

ASSESSMENT OF A CONTENT-BASED COURSE IN A TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM. A SAMPLE PROCEDURE IN A CONTENT-BASED CLASS*

EVALUACIÓN DE UN CURSO BASADO EN CONTENIDOS EN EL PROGRAMA DE LICENCIATURA. MUESTRA DE UN PROCEDIMIENTO EN UNA CLASE BASADA EN CONTENIDOS

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Abstract: The present paper is an attempt to present a sample assessment procedure that consisted on exposing pre-service teacher students in a content based class to authentic English classes so they can reflect on theory through the real practice of in-service teachers. This assessment experience was carried out with 22 undergraduate students that observed classes at a language institute to check the implementation of the Communicative Approach. The students used different instruments to collect the information that was socialized in class later on. The assessment procedure shows that students perceive this kind of assessment more motivating, engaging and meaningful than traditional testing practices.

Keywords: assessment, content based classes, teacher education program

Resumen: El presente artículo es un intento de presentar un procedimiento de evaluación que consiste en exponer a futuros licenciados que reciben clases en inglés basadas en contenido a clases de inglés auténticas y así puedan reflexionar sobre lo leído en la teoría comparado con la práctica real de docentes de inglés. Esta experiencia de evaluación se llevó a cabo con 22 estudiantes de pregrado que observaron clases en un instituto de idiomas para comprobar la aplicación del Enfoque Comunicativo. Los estudiantes utilizaron diferentes instrumentos para recoger la información que luego socializaron en clase más adelante. El procedimiento de evaluación muestra que los estudiantes perciben este tipo de evaluación más motivador, atractivo y significativo que las prácticas tradicionales de evaluación.

Palabras clave: evaluación, aprendizaje basado en contenidos, programas de licenciatura

Assessment is a key factor when it comes to determining if our students are learning or not:

In higher education, assessment is the answer to the latest educational fad, because it asks that we gather information about how well students are learning and that we use that information to inform our actions rather than just go along with what's currently in vogue. (Walvoord, 2004, p. 11)

Therefore, assessment should be meaningful and mirror the students' future professional domains and teachers should consider "how we know that our students are becoming lifelong learners" (Carter, 2007, as cited in Hall & Austin, 2014, p. 89). However, in general, teachers in Colombia lack the competences to make assessment motivating and engaging for their students (Bernal & López, 2009). This is the case of teachers at Fundación Universitaria Colombo Internacional (Unicolombo) in their classes taught in English.

The present assessment consisted of class observations at Centro Cultural Colombo Americano (CCCA), a binational language institute in which students from the undergraduate teacher program at Unicolombo carried out observations that were conducted in order to put theory into practice so the students could reflect on their own learning in an authentic environment. This paper intends to show an example of how in a content based class assessment could be more authentic since in most classes at the undergraduate program assessment is merely based on tests. For this purpose, it is important to comprehend the context where this procedure was carried out.

Unicolombo is a new university located in Cartagena de Indias. The mission of this college is to form bilingual professionals. The university originated from Centro Cultural Colombo Americano. The first program created at this college was a teacher education program. The sample procedure of this paper was developed with students from this program. All of the students of the teacher education program at Unicolombo have to take the entire English program of Colombo Americano which takes them to a B1 level according to the Common European Framework (CEF). The students also study subjects in English from fourth semester at Unicolombo so they are able to reach a B2 CEF level when they finish the major. One of the subjects is Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching, which is in the fourth semester. The students of this subject learn about the history of language teaching. The assessment procedure carried out in the present study was developed with students of this semester and the subject aforementioned.

The average age of these students is nineteen years old. Their socio-economical stratum is three in most

of the cases. Thus, they are mainly middle class. They have to have completed half of the Colombo's program to take this first subject in English. Consequently, most of the students in this class are in the level A2 of the CEF. There are 22 students, 15 women and 7 men. They are typical teenagers interested in music, fashion, television and new technologies. Most of them express that they chose this career because they loved English and teaching children. They are willing to learn. However, they are still very insecure with their command of English. These students are usually assessed through traditional procedures such as tests, writing reports and presentations of theory they learned from books and articles they have previously read. Even though this is important for their learning of the subject, they have no opportunities to compare theory with what actually happens in classes in their contexts.

The Approaches and Methods in Language teaching class, which is the focus of this study, is based on the strong version of the Communicative Approach (Larsen & Anderson, 2011), Content-Based Instruction (CBI) or Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). This approach integrates the learning of subject-matter through the use of a foreign or second language with no direct or explicit explanation of the language (Krankhe, as cited in Richards & Rogers, 2001). Therefore, the students of a CBI class "cannot be evaluated in the traditional way because they were exposed to more input and content information through the class" (Heo, 2006, p. 28). On these grounds, we can argue that assessment of CBI should not promote the learning of isolated structures but to combine information and form in a naturalistic way (Heo, 2006). As a consequence, the assessment procedure designed for the evaluation of this class is based on the Reflective Inquiry Model (Serafini, 2002) that "helps teachers collect powerful evidence of learning that demonstrates what learners can actually do, what they know, and how they learn" (Hall & Austin, 2014). In this model, "the university classroom must become not only the venue for transmitting traditional knowledge on teacher education but also a laboratory where such practices are modeled, experienced, and reflected upon" (Ross & Hannay, 1986, p. 9).

The use of the Reflective Inquiry Model poses special challenges. Teachers have to create alternative classroom assessments that assess the new academic subject-matter knowledge taking into account the students' natural and simultaneous development of communicative competence (Hall & Austin, 2014). Teachers also have to bear in mind that the assessment method should be based on performance, rather than product oriented, authentic and with quality (Butler & McMunn, 2006).

The assessment instruments designed to assess

students' performance in the Approaches and Methods class were used to examining an entire learning event or project. Thus, the instruments were a classroom observation sheet, a classroom observation report, a presentation and a rubric for the evaluation of the three first instruments. (See Appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4).

Approaches and Methods In Language Teaching A Class Description

The approaches and Methods class is a subject of the undergraduate teacher education program at Uicolombo. The students take this subject in fourth semester and it is the first module they take in the English Language. It is oriented through a Content-based methodology. The aim of this class is that students become reflective of the varieties of methods and approaches of English teaching. The aforementioned implies that the students have to know not only about the different methodologies but also to reflect on them in a real context of practice. In order to do that, the students read different articles and chapters of books in English. Then, in class they get together in groups and discuss and solve critical questions that are presented in charts (see appendix 5). The teacher circulates and gives feedback in English. After that, the class works in plenary and the teacher clarifies different concepts. For the following class, students write a summary of the salient points of the methodology that was previously studied. It is important to mention that the summary is written in Spanish since it is still very difficult for them to write paragraphs in English. However, the readings and discussions are always in the target language.

A couple of years ago, the teacher started studying traditional methods until the post-method era of our century. However, this semester, the teacher decided to start from today to the traditional methods due to the importance of the communicative teaching approaches. In previous semesters, the students did not have enough time to reflect on the current language teaching approaches because they studied them at the end of the semester and they had not enough time to reflect and internalize the principles of the new approaches.

The students studied the Communicative Language Approach in different sources like articles and books. After that, the students also watched videotaped classes from the Centro Colombo and started analyzing whether the CLT principles were put into practice.

Instruments Application Procedure

Task Description: Each pair of students observed a Centro Colombo Americano Class and filled up an observation sheet to write an observation report that will socialize in a presentation.

Goal: To determine to what extent the lesson

observed is communicative based.

The twenty two students were randomly grouped in pairs. They were assigned a Colombo class to observe. The classes were varied. They ranged from the beginning A1 level to strong A2 level. The students had to arrive fifteen minutes before the class started and then they had to talk to the teacher and ask him about the goal of the lesson. After that, they sat down in a strategic part of the class and took notes. After the class ended, the two students compared notes and filled out the observation sheet. Later, they analyzed the procedure of the class and wrote the principles of CLT observed in each stage. They might also have noted the absence of CLT principles. After that, they completed an observation report (see appendix 2). Finally, they prepared a Power Point presentation based on the observation report to describe the findings of the class observation in a class presentation (See Appendix 3).

The teacher completed a rubric (see Appendix 4) that students were previously shown. All of the instruments were posted beforehand on a Facebook group (see Appendix 6) created for the class. All of the students completed the task, except for a couple of them that had some personal problems and were unable to submit the papers and make the presentation. However, these students had the opportunity to present it afterwards.

The assessment procedure took two weeks. The first week was for the observation of the classes and the presentations were made during a class period of 135 minutes. The students had seven minutes to make their presentation in English, and three minutes for questions and feedback. The feedback corresponded not only to the content of the presentation but also to the communicative competence of the students. At the end of the class there was a general feedback for the class. All of the students also received a copy of the rubric graded. It is important to mention that this assessment procedure is 60% of the final grade of the first term of the class. The other formal grades were 20% for a reflection paper on CLT and 20% for class participation.

Reflection on the Procedure

The students were very motivated because they could practice what they had learned in the readings. Barlett (1990) claims that teacher training should be focused on reflection thus teachers become more aware of their actual teaching environment. Therefore, this explains why the students were so motivated. However, they also expressed that a test would have been less work for them.

Regarding the content of the course, students could grasp the most important concepts of CLT and they were also able to identify these principles in an actual Communicative Language Teaching class. The assessment process was important for their learning. As a result, learning did not stop while they were being assessed.

Language learning was also assessed. Although the students had important problems when they were trying to write the report and also in their oral presentations, they had the opportunity to improve their grammar, pronunciation and textual competence through the constant teacher's feedback and their own process of accomplishing each stage of the assessment.

Implications for Future Assessment Procedures

These students were stressed out at the beginning of the classes since it was their first subject-matter class in English. Thus, the teacher should be constantly scaffolding his students so the affective filter is low.

Although the students had the opportunity to orally self evaluate and react to their classmates' work, there should also be instruments for peer assessment and self assessment so all of the students feel that they are really involved in the assessment process.

Another suggestion is that these instruments should be known by the teachers that are going to be observed. Due to the time limits, the teacher of the content-based class had no time to socialize the instruments with other teachers and colleagues.

Conclusion

The assessment process should be a rewarding experience for teachers and learners. Thus, teachers should be aware of the needs of their students. These students are preparing to be future English teachers so they need to have the opportunity to use the target language in different situations and skills. Teachers should not rely only on testing, especially in Teacher Educations programs since they will be a mirror of what they see in their classes.

The methodology of these classes should be connected to the way the teacher assesses. Thus there must be coherence between teaching and assessment. Teachers will do nothing if they teach traditionally and then they pretend to use formative and alternative assessment in their classes.

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APPENDIX 1
1 LESSON PLAN OBSERVATION SHEET

Course:	Date:	Teacher:
Book:	Unit: Lesson:	Number of students:
Age average:	Aim(s): By the end of this lesson the Ss will	

Conventions:

T: teacher S: student Ss: students Pw: pair work Gw: group work P: plenary I: individual work

TIME	STAGE	PROCEDURE	INTER.

APPENDIX 2
CLASSROOM OBSERVATION REPORT

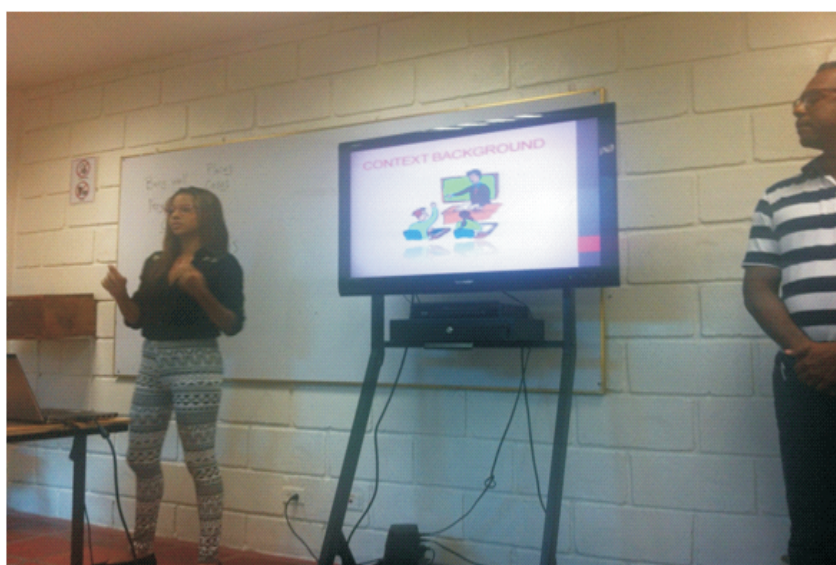
OBSERVERS: _____
 COURSE: _____ MCERL LEVEL _____ N° OF STUDENTS: _____
 DATE: _____
 CONTEXT BACKGROUND

OBSERVATION	PRINCIPLES

1. What is the goal of the lesson?
2. What is the role of the teacher/students?
3. What are some characteristics of the teaching/learning process?
4. What is the nature of interaction in the class?
5. How are the feelings of the students dealt with?
6. How is the language viewed/ how is culture viewed?
7. What areas of language are emphasized? What language skills are emphasized?
8. What is the role of the students' native language?
9. How is evaluation accomplished?
10. How does teacher respond to student errors?

CONCLUSION

APPENDIX 3 (PRESENTATIONS)



APPENDIX 4 (RUBRIC)
UNICOLOMBO
LICENCIATURA EN EDUCACIÓN BÁSICA CON ÉNFASIS EN INGLÉS
APPROACHES AND METHODS- FOURTH SEMESTER

Task Description: Each pair of students will observe a Centro Colombo Americano Class and will fill up an observation sheet to write an observation report that will socialize in a presentation.

Goal: To determine to what extent the lesson observed is communicative based.

NAMES:

Final Project: Class observation Report-Presentation Criteria and Rubric

Grading Criteria	Outstanding	Adequate	Developing	Not Present
Total Points: 60	8-10 pts.	6-7 pts.	1-5 pts.	0 pts.
	All criteria are present and developed fully	Most of the criteria are developed adequately	Some of the criteria are somewhat developed	None of the criteria are present
Observation Sheet (10 pts) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describes the course adequately Provides complete information of the class Uses suggested conventions 				
Total points for this section: _____				
	25-30 pts.	17-24 pts.	1-16 pts.	0 pts.
Observation Report (30 points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describes the context background Demonstrates reflection on the class observed Answers all of the questions appropriately Concludes the report with an adequate reflection Demonstrates adequate academic writing according to students' level 				
Total points for this section: _____				
	15-20 pts.	8-14 pts.	1-7 pts.	0 pts.
Presentation (20 points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a summary of information from each section above Is visually appealing, creative and neat Is interactive in some way Demonstrates fluent 				

APPENDIX 5

1 COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING CHART

Goal	
Role of teacher and Students	
Teaching and Learning Process	
Interaction	
Affective factors	

APPENDIX 6

Facebook Group

